

## INFORMATION PAPER

MCEU-JA (600-50d)

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### **SUBJECT: Use of First-Class Airline Accommodations on Official Travel**

1. **PURPOSE:** To provide information regarding official travel using first-class airline accommodations.

2. **FACTS:**

a. It is federal policy that employees on official business who use commercial air carriers for domestic and international travel shall use coach-class accommodations, with limited exceptions.

(1) First-class accommodations may be purchased with appropriated funds, with Secretary of the Army approval, when:

(a) No other reasonably available accommodations exist. "Reasonably available" means coach-class or premium-class (other than first-class) seats are available within 24 hours of proposed departure or arrival time. However, accommodations are not "reasonably available" if the employee will arrive at the duty site after the required reporting time, or depart earlier than the scheduled duty completion time.

(b) Travel by a disabled employee whose condition necessitates first-class travel. This must be substantiated in writing by competent medical authority. An attendant, whose services are required en route, may also fly first-class.

(c) Exceptional security circumstances. These include, but are not limited to, travel by agents-in-charge of protective details, couriers accompanying controlled pouches, and employees whose use of less than first-class would endanger their lives or Government property.

(d) The Secretary has retained personal approval authority for all requests to use appropriated funds for first-class travel.

(2) Premium-class (other than first-class), such as business-class, may be used when:

(a) Regularly scheduled flights along the required route only provide premium-class seats.

(b) No space is available in coach, travel is urgent and cannot be postponed.

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(c) Travel involves an employee with a disability substantiated in writing by competent medical authority. An attendant may accompany him in premium-class, if necessary.

(d) Security purposes or exceptional circumstances exist.

(e) When travel on a foreign flag carrier has been approved and the sanitation or health standards in coach are inadequate.

(f) When overall savings to the Government would result, such as avoidance of additional subsistence costs, overtime, or lost productive time incurred while waiting for available coach seats.

(g) When travel costs are paid by a non-federal source and properly accepted under statutory authority. (31 U.S.C. § 1353). Payments from a non-federal source may not be used for first-class travel, only coach or premium-class.

(h) When travel is in excess of 14 hours and there is insufficient time for rest en route or upon arrival, and when official business must be transacted shortly after arrival. Ordinarily, this would preclude purchase of business-class seats for the return trip. In these cases, the travel approving authority is not required to authorize a business class seat. The decision should be based on the availability of funds and mission needs, and should not be based on convenience to the traveler.

(i) Frequent flyer benefits earned on official travel may be used for upgrades to premium-class on future official travel, but not to first-class. However, first consideration must be given to defraying government costs if sufficient points can be accumulated to purchase a ticket for official travel..

b. The rules with respect to the use of frequent traveler points are:

(1) The first use of bonus miles and other such benefits earned on official travel continues to be the reduction of future official travel costs.

(2) For accommodations other than airline seats, (such car rentals or hotels) frequent flyer points earned on official travel may be used for upgrades.

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c. "On-the-spot" upgrades.

(1) Upgrades may be accepted if generally available to the public, all Federal employees, or all military members. They may not be accepted if offered because of a traveler's rank or official position.

(2) Upgrade coupons which do not involve the expenditure of frequent flyer points may also be used as long as they have not been offered due to rank or official position.

(3) Military members should not accept upgrades to first-class while travelling in uniform because of the potential for adverse public perception.

d. A person travelling on TDY may use his or her own personal travel benefits or funds to upgrade to first-class.

e. The Secretary of the Army has prohibited anyone in uniform from sitting in a first-class seat, even when the seat has not been purchased with appropriated funds.